



**ESTABLISHING FAITH-BASED RESOURCE CENTERS
IN MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES**

**A Practical Research Project
Submitted for
Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry
Spiritual Renewal, Contemplative Practices
and Strategic Leadership**



BRENDA MAULL-WILMORE

© 2018

Brenda Maull-Wilmore

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED



This professional project completed by

BRENDA MAULL-WILMORE

has been presented to and accepted by the
faculty of Claremont School of Theology in
partial fulfillment of the requirements of the

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY
Spiritual Renewal, Contemplative Practices
and Strategic Leadership

Faculty Committee

Dr. Karen Dalton

Dr. Lincoln Galloway

Dr. Nicholas Grier

Dean of the Faculty

Rev. Dr. Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook

May 2018

**ESTABLISHING FAITH-BASED RESOURCE CENTERS
IN MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES**

Brenda Maull-Wilmore

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Karen Dalton
Nicholas Grier
Lincoln Galloway

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express gratitude to Dr. Lincoln Galloway for helping me at a crucial time during the launch of this project. Thank you for not giving up on me.

Thank you to Dr. Nicholas Grier for so graciously ushering me along the way with encouraging words of support. I appreciate the time you spent with me during hybrid intensive. Your guidance and direction during and following hybrid intensive helped me to stay the course.

Many thanks to Dr. Karen Dalton for so generously coaching and mentoring students of the DMin. program. Professor Dalton never misses an opportunity to be of help to students in need of direction.

Peace and God's blessings to my spiritual and contemplative practice masters, Dr. Frank Rogers and Dr. Andy Dreitcer, who both opened my eyes to the power of practicing compassion. Specifically, Dr. Frank Rogers, who through Practicing Compassion, enlightened me on the potential for reconciling life circumstances through grounding myself in the U-Turn.

*Dedication to
John and Rosie Maull*

My beloved mom and dad, to whom I attribute my relationship with God and church. I am eternally grateful to them for instilling in me faith, family rituals, and the Bible as the gateway to deepening my spiritual connection with the Higher Divine Power. These early teachings shaped my thinking about humanity, spirituality, and goodwill toward others in need of help. My parents' were practitioners of what Biblical scripture teaches "Love your neighbor as yourself."

“You Must Be the Change You Wish to See in The World.”

Powerfully Spiritual Words that Inspires Believers to Endeavor to Make the World
A Better Place for All of Humanity.

~Mahatma Gandhi~

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables

| | |
|--|-----|
| Acknowledgements | iii |
| Chapter | |
| 1. Introduction | 1 |
| Research Problem | 5 |
| Research Methods | 7 |
| Context | 8 |
| My Position and History | 8 |
| Target Audience | 10 |
| Scope and Limitation | 10 |
| 2. Justification | 12 |
| What are Marginalized Communities? | 14 |
| What are Disenfranchised Communities?..... | 15 |
| A Working Definition of Communities..... | 16 |
| 3. Literature Review | 18 |
| Compassion | 18 |
| Empathy | 19 |
| Justice | 20 |
| Theological and Theoretical Foundations | 23 |
| 4. Research Design and Research Findings | 28 |
| Research Design..... | 28 |
| Autoethnography Defined..... | 28 |
| Reflexive Dyadic Interviews | 29 |
| Research Findings & Analysis of Findings | 30 |
| Comparable Resource Centers Findings..... | 51 |
| 5. Discussion..... | 56 |
| Critical Reflection | 56 |
| Recommendation for Establishing Faith-Based Resource Centers in Marginalized Communities..... | 60 |
| Conclusion..... | 65 |
| Bibliography | 66 |
| Appendix: | |
| A. Faith-Based Youth Finance Literacy Module | |

ESTABLISHING FAITH-BASED RESOURCE CENTERS IN COMMUNITIES MARGINALIZED

Chapter 1

Introduction

Throughout my life, I have experienced the love, grace, and presence of God in my spiritual journey. In reflection, my parents' grounded my faith and belief in the Lord from early childhood. They taught me about the love of God, God's mercy, and infinite grace. Devotional rituals, daily prayer, Christian Doctrine, church and family relationship was, and still is important to African American culture. Growing up, family conversations about God and spiritual matters was as regular a topic during the weekday as messages from the pulpit were on Sunday mornings.

Being so immersed in church activity seemed like a chore in the days of my youth. However, I can now reflect on those days with heartfelt gratitude and fond memories. From my perspective, family values, faith practices, and church relationship shaped my thinking in ways that helped me as a youth to discern right from wrong; as a young adult to make sense of things; and as an older and wiser adult to make meaning of my direction in life.

I attribute my relationship with the Lord and faith tradition to my parents', who believed being grounded in devotional rituals to be an affirmation of faith. They viewed it as planting the Holy seed, in which they had the responsibility of watering. My parents' loved the Lord, and were extremely faithful in their spiritual practices. They took great pride in nurturing what I would describe as the long run of a child's life. They were not long on money, but they invested

every ounce of what I considered their most precious commodity, which was their time, to the upbringing of their children.

For me, I found faith, family rituals, and building familiarity with the Bible to be the gateway to deepening one's relationship with God. I attribute my spiritual growth to the early shaping of moral and spiritual values instilled by my parents'. These teachings shaped my thinking about spirituality and humanity. My parents' were genuinely good people who cared deeply about the wellbeing of their children. From them I learned the significance of scriptural passages like "Love your neighbor as yourself."¹ My parents' willingness to help others in need, and without borders, has remained constant in my life's journey. Neighborliness continues to impact my personal growth and development. I attribute my penchant for volunteerism and advocacy work to watching my parents' exercise goodwill toward others experiencing hardship.

I have remained Christian throughout my adulthood. However, during my lifetime, it has increasingly become important to live out my life in a manner that deepens my relationship with the Higher Divine Power. In so doing, I am drawn to explore contemplative practices that are considered rituals of Buddhism. I believe in the power of centering prayer, a Christian ritual that some traditions of Buddhism also practice. It has for many years been my desire to learn more about various religions, because my calling is to serve beyond the walls of the church. Therefore, to minister without borders, it's important to be culturally competent in other faith traditions. From my point of view, God is about love of humanity, and not so much about distinguishing one faith tradition from another. I believe as a Christian I must extend without bias, the hand of fellowship, love of God, and the Lord's teachings of neighborly love to all of humanity.

¹ Matt. 22:39 (NRSV).

In the book of Ephesians, it focuses on Unity in Christ and its meaning. Specific passages place emphasis on the significance of “Making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”² I relate its meaning to believers avowing to make every effort to be bonded by peace and spiritual unity. I believe that God sees all of humanity as worthy, and expects us to be accepting, considerate, and forgiving of each other. We are all tools and instruments of God, created to embrace opportunities to uplift one another. Not forgetting to exercise neighborliness toward the downtrodden, who are the least among us. I believe that all these things work together in unity for the good of humankind.

I have always been touched spiritually by the parable of the Good Samaritan. It is a reminder that we are all a part of humanity, and sent here as travelers on an earthly mission with an end date that we are unaware of. There are no promises of who we will travel with; how long our journey on earth will last; and with little insight on challenges we may encounter along the way.

I ground myself in following the teachings of Jesus in His travels, and that is to treat the other with neighborliness. Biblical scripture in this regard encourages “loving your neighbor as yourself.”³ When I ponder the question: who is my neighbor? I reflect on Jesus of the Disinherited by Howard Thurman. Thurman states, “neighborliness is nonspatial; it is qualitative. A man must love his neighbor directly, clearly, permitting no barriers between.”⁴ For me, everyone I encounter in life is my neighbor, and worthy of being treated with love that is life-giving. Without question, when I start from a place of love it gives rise to compassion, mercy, and grace toward all of God’s creations.

² Eph. 4:3 (NRSV).

³ Matt. 19:19 (NRSV).

⁴ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 79.

I have evolved to a place of deep commitment to family, friends, acquaintances, and deeply embedded lived theologies. These lived theologies shape the way I think, react, and respond to life circumstances. However, I am profoundly empathetic to the struggles of the poor and marginalized. Therefore, I say with affirmation of my Christian tradition, and faith practices, that the core of my belief is rooted in the love of God sustaining all of humanity.

When I reflect on the parable of the Good Samaritan, I am strengthened. The parable reminds me of the importance of staying grounded in love and neighborliness. Empathy emerges when we look at suffering through the compassionate eyes of the heart. I believe it is this kind of compassion that Howard Thurman referenced in *Jesus of the Disinherited* as true “neighborliness.”⁵ I would argue true neighborliness extends beyond the inner walls of one’s church or household. Neighborliness moves and motivates me to stretch beyond the confines of religion to seek a spiritual connection centered in human kindness. It accounts for the yearning within me to serve as an advocate of change for marginalized people who suffer needlessly.

In my youth, I loved running errands in the neighborhood for my mom. When my mother told me to run to the store for fresh fruit or produce, at the time, there were many nearby markets to choose from. In my mind’s eye, I can envision stopping along the way to pick fresh fruit from an abundance of well-maintained fruit trees lining neighborhood streets. My mother and father are gone now, as are many of the local grocery stores, fresh fruit, and vegetable markets that once saturated the communities. Sadly, the wholesome way of life that served as the source for organic and nutritious produce has also made its transition out of low income neighborhoods.

In Altruism, Matthieu Ricard articulates his thoughts about the Theory of Moral Sentiments, Ricard states “To restrain our selfish, and to indulge our benevolent affections,

⁵ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 79.

constitutes the perfection of human nature; and can alone produce among mankind that harmony of sentiments and passions in which consists their whole grace and propriety.”⁶ It is from reflections on days gone by when neighborhoods thrived from access to resources and information that I am called to be the voice for the voiceless. It is in mission services beyond the walls of the church that I am most passionate.

Research Problem

This project seeks to address the need to establish faith-based community resource centers to assist people who are marginalized and disenfranchised. It draws on the long-term vision of providing legal services, education, and health and wellness resources to low income families. This project will address the more short-term concern of how to establish faith-based community resource centers that provide health and wellness resources to communities of marginalized people.

Both my professional and life experiences spanning 30-plus years in nonprofit management, equipped me with an astute understanding of the plight of poor and disenfranchised communities. Neglect and abandonment has an impact on the effectiveness of faith institutions that are striving to improve living conditions of the wider community.

In order to find solutions for strengthening communities weakened by environmental and economic disparities, one must be firmly entrenched in cultivating meaningful relationships. In so doing, it is important to remember the importance of valuing human rights no matter the status or social location of individuals. In *Faith and Human Rights*, Amesbury and Newlands argue that

⁶ Matthieu Richard, *Altruism: The Power of Compassion to Change Yourself and The World* (New York: Back Bay Books/Little, Brown and Company, 2013), 567.

“Everyone feels marginalized in some ways at different times.”⁷ The writers also assert “Not all marginalization amounts to denial of human rights, but denial is often the next step. It is incumbent on all Christians to do what they can to act in solidarity with those most in need.”⁸

Sadly, for some congregants, it is tough to act in solidarity, because they don’t feel vested in their respective church community. I believe this to be true more so when churchgoers live in different communities from their church site. Since many churchgoers reside in more affluent neighborhoods than their church community, it is easy to look away from problems that exist in communities on the fringe. In *The Courage to Lead*, James Henry Harris discusses the effect of residential location and social status within African American communities. According to James Henry Harris “Black laity must not allow spatial distances-geographical or social-to circumvent the belief that unity and not fragmentation will bring meaningful social, political, and economic change. Where African Americans live within the city, especially if it is in a middle-class community, must not cause them to lose focus of the residential status of most of their brothers and sisters.”⁹

This project is committed to supporting people of color residing in disenfranchised communities, who look to faith institutions for pastoral care, healing, guidance, service, and resource assistance. This research project will be supported by a wealth of business experience and academic knowledge. Support is essential to giving the project the edge needed to transform communities from resource scarcity to worthwhile places to stay. Having a keen understanding

⁷ Richard Amesbury and George M. Newlands, *Faith and Human Rights: Christianity and the Global Struggle for Human Dignity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 119.

⁸ Ibid., 119.

⁹ James Henry Harris, *The Courage to Lead: Leadership in the African American Urban Church* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2002), 118.

of business related services needed in faith settings, comes from observing churches situated in marginalized communities struggle for years to remain relevant.

Research Methods

This project combines theory and the practice of ministry. It will begin with library research in the areas of spiritual practices, non-profits, and emerging approaches to ministries involved in community engagement. The practical component will involve qualitative research methods, specifically autoethnography. Since the research approach is qualitative, Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Claremont School of Theology is not claimed.

The ultimate and larger vision that undergirds this project is the need to establish faith-based community resource centers in communities that are marginalized. This project will seek to answer the question: What steps should be taken to establish faith based community resource centers that provide health and wellness resources to communities of marginalized people?

This project will focus on the preliminary work of gathering information pertinent to establishing a faith-based community resource center. A critical factor contributing to the substantive importance of this project will be ethnographic narrative interviews. Narrative interviews of this sort can be helpful in bringing attention to the process of establishing a faith-based resource center.

In undertaking the preliminary task of establishing faith-based community resource centers in this project, ethnographic narrative of the following consults and meetings are recounted:

1. Consult with faith leaders, key civic leaders, and local officials on healthcare and wellness matters of concern to marginalized communities.

2. Consult with civic leaders to learn about community redevelopment projects, land use, and existing corridor recovery projects impacting targeted marginalized communities; and identify specific locations to develop health and wellness services.
3. Identify information resources, centers and services that address the needs of disenfranchised faith communities.
4. Maintain a detailed journal of all meetings with key figures and community stakeholders.

Context

As a student of spiritual renewal, leadership, and ministry, I am purposed to use my professional experience and academic training to serve as a transformative faith leader. My spiritual calling is to serve communities in desperate need of healing and empowerment. The mission of this project is to inform, educate, and provide targeted faith communities with tools and skills they would not, otherwise, have immediate access to. The project's faith mission is grounded in centralizing resources to health and wellness, legal aid, and empowerment information. This project makes easier a level playing field of economic opportunities for communities disenfranchised.

I envision a world passionate about ending suffering of the poor and defeated. The belief is that community systems that better serve stakeholders are also equipped to transform lives. I am called to serve as a transformative faith leader committed to fostering community relationships through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The proposed resource center, when implemented, will seek to provide meaningful support services to faith communities disenfranchised. The long term objectives of the center will include facilitating legal aid, economic opportunity, and health resources to low income communities in need.

My Position and History

Essential to understanding the importance of this research project is gaining perspective on my connection and relationship to marginalized communities. I believe my ministry is defined and deeply impacted by commitment to family, friends, acquaintances, and deeply embedded lived theologies. I would argue this devotion shapes the way I think, react, and respond to the struggles of poor people. I serve in a faith community where most residents are unemployed or underemployed.

My personal and professional life has always been empathetically impacted by the struggles of poor and impoverished communities. I attribute this passion to my parents' enduring the painful *isms* of poverty while living in the south. My parents' lived in Montgomery and Birmingham, Alabama during the timespan of Jim Crow Laws, and the Civil Rights Movement. They lived and experienced firsthand the impact hatred and racism has on one's ability to control one's own personhood.

Both my mom and dad were genuinely good people. Following their own relocation, my parents' blessed many other family members who migrated from the south to live in Los Angeles. My parents' generously housed family members who left the south seeking a better life. My parents' remained active in church, unceasingly encouraging family members to deepen their relationship with God and church tradition. They were practitioners of goodwill, and pillars of the community immediately surrounding our neighborhood. Love of God, and the teachings of Jesus' humanity, and human kindness was the mantra my parents' lived by.

These deeply embedded theologies have guided me in my own life's journey. The core of my Christian tradition, and faith practices is entirely rooted in my parents' teachings. They taught me from early childhood the significance of being enterprising and self-reliant. Most importantly, and above all else, my parents' instilled in me the worth of family, faith; and love of

God sustaining all of humanity. Despite the hatred and racial divide my parents' experienced in the south, they chose to help others without regard for one's religion, faith tradition, race or social location.

Target Audience

The target audience of engagement for this research project is faith groups, community advocates, public and civic officeholders, and elected officials. This targeted group is reflective of who I consider the community stakeholders. The project envisions reorienting faith traditions on the significant value of ministering beyond the walls of the church.

This project will serve as a platform for outreach to social media outlets. The intention is to use media platforms to speak passionately about social justice issues, and community conflicts that impact health conditions. This project aims to facilitate faith community forums directed at preserving cultural traditions which build and nurture family values.

Faith institutions situated in poor areas strive to improve living conditions of the wider community. However, effectiveness of the work faith groups are called to is hindered by lack of finances, meaningful community resources, and affordable professional services. Churches in poor communities lack resources and support systems to provide meaningful services to the broader community. In order for faith institutions to better serve constituents, they must embrace tangible approaches to bringing neighboring communities together.

Scope and Limitations

The long term goal of this project is to create faith-based community resource centers in marginalized communities. The intention is to establish centers purposed in facilitating long term viable support services of benefit to individuals and families. Grounded in faith, resource centers will carry out the mission of delivering social and legal services, education, health information,

and wellness resources as its way of sharing its ministry. However, due to time restraints of this initial phase, the project will be limited to preliminary steps of research. The idea is to lay the foundation for community resource centers coming into fruition later.

The initial phase of project will lay the foundation for community resource centers coming into full fruition at a later date. The scope of preliminary steps includes the following:

- Identifying civic and government agencies that are concerned with health and wellness of individuals within marginalized communities.
- Identifying and consulting with community stakeholders who are charged with community redevelopment projects.
- Developing a network database of faith groups, public, and private agencies.
- Beginning the process of identifying specific initial services that will be of greatest benefit to community stakeholders.
- Researching local permit processes and zoning regulations that govern targeted programs.
- Exploring the development of a tentative Business Plan.
- Exploring development of a faith-based basic financial literacy training module for youth of underserved communities.

I believe churches will rally around the concept of a neutral faith entity assuming the role of community advocate for participating stakeholders.

Chapter 2

Justification

This project is important because there is an expectation that faith institutions are purposed to serve as sanctuaries of healing, guidance, reconciliation, and justice-making. However, in many instances the work of faith institutions is not fully reflective of the Gospel of Jesus Christ with compassionate concern for the well-being of all people. In *Hunger for Justice*, Jack Nelson reflects on God being the voice for the poor. In as much, Nelson contends “the suffering of the poor is an indication that there is something deeply wrong in the religious and social fabric of the nation. Just as a red light flashes a warning when a car is running without enough oil, the suffering of the poor flashes a warning that our political, economic, and religious systems are functioning without justice.”¹⁰ Likewise, the work of resource centers is centered in being the voice of the poorest among us who are crying out for justice.

From my perspective, the time is up for ignoring the well-being of brothers and sisters living in poverty. If we seek to transform lives, we must recognize that people resigned to living in marginalized communities are not the decision-makers. It is the wealthy and powerful who will continue to be in control of the fate of the poor, that is, until those who love God take to the helm, and advocate in unity for justice. Jesus’ life and teaching was consistent with zero tolerance for injustice and inequality. I believe if we assert that we know and love God, we must be intent on living with hearts open to love one another, and to seek justice where it doesn’t exist.

¹⁰ Jack A. Nelson, *Hunger for Justice: The Politics of Food and Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1980), 186.

The vision that undergirds this project is the need to establish faith-based community resource centers in communities that are marginalized. This research project is an exploration of solutions for improving access to information, resources, and services. The project will seek to answer the question: What steps should be taken to establish faith based community resource centers that provide information, services, and resources to communities of marginalized people? In so doing, the project will specifically address how does being a faith-based center help marginalized and disenfranchised communities?

The intention is to establish a faith-based nonprofit organization, which aims to bridge relationships between diverse faith traditions, government agencies, and secular entities. Having expert consulting services will be important to assisting marginalized and disenfranchised communities thrive and compete for valued resources.

Communities marginalized are primarily comprised of low income people of color unemployed and underemployed. This research project seeks to fill the gap as a meaningful support system offering services, information, and access to meaningful resources that will address food desert issues of communities marginalized. There are countless community based initiatives that aim to improve healthcare equity in poor communities. However, not enough has been done to intersect change through faith-based approaches. In *More than Just Food*, Garrett Broad discusses the intention of food justice movements in urban communities, he explains “While these programs have undoubtedly benefitted a number of food system stakeholders, their results have proved uneven. Notably, many alternative food initiatives have consistently

overlooked the systemic racialized and economic components of food-related inequality, and as a result, they have failed to promote justice for all.”¹¹

This research project intends to more effectively give voice to the real life experiences of disenfranchised communities, and directly bridge conversations with public agencies, elected officials, and other secular agencies. There is a need to hold accountable those persons and agencies charged with looking out for the well-being of the community residents. It is my hope to implement processes that ensure equal access to information, health resources, legal aid, and economic opportunity of benefit.

Marginalized and Disenfranchised Communities

What are Marginalized Communities?

Important to appreciating the need for such a project, is gaining perspective on the meaning of: marginalized, disenfranchised, and communities. It helps to have a sense of addressing, who are the groups of people in such communities?

Marginalized communities can be defined as those who are underserved, disregarded, ostracized, harassed, discriminated against, sidelined, under protection order, and living on the fringe. Marginalize means to “relegate individuals or groups of society powerless and unimportant positions in society rooted in suffering.”¹² The list is far more extensive, but for the purpose of this project, marginalized can be identified as groups in communities comprised of those who are:

¹¹ Garrett Broad, *More than Just Food: Food Justice and Community Change* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 35.

¹² Merriam-Webster Online, "marginalize," accessed January 18, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/marginalize>.

- People of color
- Immigrants, Refugees, and Migrants
- Women and Children
- Victims of Human Trafficking
- Mentally Ill, Developmentally Delayed, and Physically Disabled
- Children, Youth, and Young Adults under age 21
- People of Differing Sexual Orientation (LGBTQ community)
- Homeless People
- Incarcerated People (and their families)
- People Released from Incarceration
- People with Criminal Records
- People with Low Socioeconomic Status
- Unemployed and Underemployed People

What are Disenfranchised Communities?

The disenfranchised can be defined as “individuals or groups of people stripped or deprived of their rights and power.”¹³ To be disenfranchised is the “revocation of the right of rights through practices, prevention of a person exercising the right to vote. It is also termed to the revocation of power or control of a particular individual, community or being to the natural amenity they are abound in; that is to deprive of a franchise, of a legal right, of some privilege or inherent immunity. Disfranchisement may be accomplished explicitly by law or implicitly through requirements applied in a discriminatory fashion, intimidation, or by placing unreasonable requirements on voters for registration or voting.”¹⁴

Race has a way of excessively disenfranchising people of color with criminal records from voting. Not surprisingly, many black and brown people with criminal records are already sidelined as the result of living on the fringes of communities marginalized. They are sanctioned from participating in electoral systems that govern resources, information, and laws that control them and their families.

¹³ Vocabulary, "disenfranchised," Accessed January 18, 2018, <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/disfranchised>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Education inequality puts young people from poor communities at a disadvantage. I believe this type of disenfranchising of young people puts them unfairly on a path to incarceration. We live in a society that promises young people the right to education. However, that right does not always carry over to young people sentenced to do time in juvenile detention centers. It's deeply concerning to know there are young people in juvenile detention centers who cannot read or write, yet these same young people complete their time in detention center without building upon simple basic reading and financial literacy skills.

The Southern Education Foundation (SEF), a nonprofit based in Atlanta whose mission is to advance education equity and academic excellence, conducted a study on incarcerated youth. The study conducted by SEF reported that "The education provided to the 70,000 juveniles incarcerated on any given day across the nation is substandard and is setting them even further back in their ability to turn their lives around."¹⁵ The Southern Education Foundation found that "the effects of the juvenile justice programs are profound and crippling, setting youth back instead of helping them. Many of these students have learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral problems, and health issues."¹⁶ It saddens me to know this kind of injustice is still tolerated in public education systems of America.

A Working Definition of Community

The word Community as it's applied in this research project is reflective of groups of people with similar characteristics that point to their strengths and weaknesses. There is a common connection, which links the challenging dynamics and culture of the community circle

¹⁵ Susan Frey, *Juvenile Justice System Schools: Do More Harm Than Good*, accessed February 15, 2018,

<https://edsources.org/2014/report-juvenile-justice-system-schools-do-more-harm-than-good/63524>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

this research project aims to serve. In *Good Food, Strong Communities*, Steve Ventura and Martin Bailkey present their perspective on how organizations and institutions address food desert issues in communities of concern.

With respect to community, Ventura and Bailkey explain how “In some circles, *community* [my italics] is a code word for people outside the dominant institution that controls the resources, which in this context could be money, research, information, technical assistance, or simply access. Institutions such as universities, the judicial system, and corporate entities often seek to ‘partner’ with community entities-either nonprofit organizations or individuals active in the organizing of the communities that require services or assistance. There is a prevailing belief within grassroots intellectual spaces that such big institutions cannot have equitable relationships with community-based organizations, especially those led by people of color.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Steve Ventura and Martin Bailkey, *Good Food, Strong Communities: Promoting Social Justice through Local and Regional Food Systems* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2017), 230.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

Compassion

Individual and faith communities involved in creating programs must understand and discern strategies, and spiritual practices vital to undergirding their work. Frank Rogers, Professor of Spiritual Formation at Claremont School of Theology addresses these spiritual practices in his book *Practicing Compassion*. I reflect on the experience with connection to Frank Rogers book, *Practicing Compassion*. He notes the act of “taking the other’s pulse” is a loving and powerful way of grounding oneself in compassion. In my experience, “taking the pulse” is a way of connecting with compassion to what life circumstances must be like for the other person, who may be experiencing some level of hardship.¹⁸

I believe Dr. Rogers process of “Taking the U-Turn” is intended to bring into line, human impulses that are often left unattended to. From my perspective, “Taking the U-Turn” is an open invitation to explore the root of what’s going on internally with oneself, and with the other. For me, the process ushers in patience, empathy, and understanding in a way that could potentially cultivate connection in community relationships. To be clear, in the face of difficult moments, I would argue “taking the U-Turn” is an opportunity to be kind, goodhearted, and genuinely empathetic toward others.¹⁹

As described in Rogers book *Practicing Compassion*, “Taking the U-Turn” involves discernment, assessing potential outcomes, and the opportunity to cultivate a new relationship. In Rogers book, he discusses the process of cultivating compassion by catching your breath, Rogers

¹⁸ Frank Rogers Jr., *Practicing Compassion* (Nashville: The Upper Room, 2015), 30.

¹⁹ Ibid.

states “taking a time-out, walking outdoors, going on a retreat, finding a moment to ourselves or with God, or simply catching our breath solidifies our footing until the ground feels solid, safe, or perhaps sacred enough to engage the situation more clearly.”²⁰

Empathy

In Lasater’s book, *What We Say Matters*, it discusses how empathy brings about connection in relationships. Lasater’s state “When you offer an empathic guess as to what is going on for them at this moment, it is much more likely they will shift into the present moment and into a connection with you. When you lead them gently into an empathetic connection, you both will probably enjoy the moment more.”²¹ I believe Lasater and Lasater are attempting to illustrate the significance of keeping one’s mind and heart focused on nurturing relationships. Nurturing comes from a place of understanding that what’s being cultivated is greater than one’s own self and personal agenda.

There are many who view people of poor communities as lazy or lacking the motivation to raise their own standard of living. Some of the more vociferous affluent critics go as far as labeling unemployed and underemployed people as moochers. I believe while empathy may inspire compassion on the part of some caring individuals, it is more exhausting for others to understand the plight of the poor. Sadly, those individuals will most likely distance themselves from empathizing with the community this project aims to serve. More work is needed to reach individuals consumed by apathy.

²⁰ Ibid., 28.

²¹ Judith Hanson Lasater and Ike K. Lasater, *What We Say Matters: Practicing Nonviolent Communication* (Berkeley: Rodmill Press, 2009), 81.

Justice

Having basic needs met is often associated with the true possibilities of experiencing abundance through the grace of God. In *Stations of the Banquet*, Cathy Campbell acknowledges the divine relationship between abundance and the Creator. Campbell parallels the significance of God's signature being as boldly imprinted on justice as it is on abundance, she states "To know God is to know a God of justice. Justice shapes the divine horizon of action. It is part of God's impossible possibility for human history. It is a lode star for the journey of the banquet. Justice is the flavor of the banquet. Without it all is bitter."²² Campbell recognizes the struggles of the poor and oppressed. She draws attention to exercising mercy, compassion, and moral responsibility in responding to the needs of the poorest. She draws on the relationship of God's vision of the fullness of life for all of creation, and without borders. Campbell states "It is our immersion in the reality of abundance that pours from the heart of the God that gives us the courage, strength, and joy to engage the powers and principalities that diminish the abundance of life for all in our day."²³

The goal of this project is to deliver services in a way that shares more equitably, resources that could benefit the poor, disenfranchised, and marginalized people. The intention is for deliverables to include services to seniors, veterans, disabled, and low income families. Campbell asserts "Just as it is not a particular food choice or any one meal that defines a diet, but the habitual patterns and compassionate act, but rather a steady diet of them that matters. Again, the issue is not so much the quantity of gestures, but rather a dependable disposition of the heart

²² Cathy C. Campbell, *Stations of the Banquet: Faith Foundation for Food Justice* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), 171.

²³ Ibid., 172.

and mind. It is not about earning God's favor, for we are already assured of God's love. It is rather a matter of sharing that grace in which we already live."²⁴

Many residents from marginalized communities lean heavily on support from their family, and faith tradition. It's been my observation that in the midst of hopelessness, individuals find resolve in dealing with troubling life circumstances through prayer. Prayer is powerful. I have witnessed those besieged by life struggles, pray with heartfelt conviction for God's grace and mercifulness to lift them out of poverty. It is heart wrenching to listen to testimonials from individuals, who lament about having no firsthand knowledge of what it feels like to be treated justly. When people are unemployed and underemployed, it sidelines them from having access to goods and services that are readily available to residents of more affluent communities.

In *Unbowed*, Wangari Maathai reflects on her life's journey of being a source of energy for community residents frustrated by lack of power, she states "I could not give them alms or even miracles, but together we could lift ourselves up and address the conditions of our poverty and disempowerment and regain our sense of self-respect."²⁵ This research project envisions establishment of a center that inspires hope, encouragement, and empowerment to community residents seeking a helping hand. I envision the resource center being the catalyst to lift individuals out of circumstances that for too long sidelined them from being productive members of society.

Through the course of research on establishing faith-based resource centers in marginalized communities, I found other activists type faith-based groups to collaborate with in the future. These other faith-based groups are discussed later in the autoethnography chapter. It is through collective efforts that faith resource centers can build the capacity to reach broader

²⁴ Ibid., 76.

²⁵ Wangari Muta Maathai, *Unbowed - A Memoir* (New York: Anchor Books, 2007), 287.

audiences. In *More than Just Food*, Garrett Broad posits “I argue that community-based food justice does indeed offer a valuable model for the promotion of social and racial justice in the contemporary age. The salience of food as a universal social and cultural necessity, combined with the documented ability of local organizing to serve as an avenue for capacity-building within historically marginalized communities, offers a foundation upon which an agenda for sustainable community change can be built.”²⁶

It is true that local government agencies play a key role in ensuring that entities comply with delivering healthy food choices. However, when advocating for food justice, one must understand systems of other related agencies that are capable of providing resources and services. According to *Good Food, Strong Communities*, Ventura and Bailkey contend “In order for community and regional food systems to transform and support family farms, public health, food security, resource stewardship, youth development, job creation, racial and economic justice, or any other social goals, we must understand and succeed in the marketplace. However, the marketplace is a complex concept; it involves social, political, and economic processes that unfold over days, weeks, and years.”²⁷ I contend that faith-based resource centers acting as central facilitators, can potentially leverage access to multiple opportunities on behalf of community stakeholders.

Ventura and Bailkey examined a wide range of approaches to offering healthy food options in urban communities similar to the landscape of South Los Angeles. The results of their studies assert that “One means of increasing the availability of healthy food is to start and support farmers’ markets in low-income communities.”²⁸ Fortunately, this research project when

²⁶ Garrett Broad, *More than Just Food*, 9.

²⁷ Ventura and Bailkey, *Good Food, Strong Communities*, 108.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

launched, will have the capacity to tap into a variety of options for implementing food systems of benefit to marginalized communities. Viable sources of healthy food options to consider include farmers' markets, food pantries, grocery giveaway programs, and regional food banks.

Theological and Theoretical Foundations

Sacred text and Christian teaching exhort us to attend to the needs of all people with love. When we attend to the needs of others, we begin to enter into relationship that empathetically deepens our understanding of suffering. Empathy guides us with compassion that exists beyond the realm of our own existence. Sacred text teaches how Jesus identified with the poor and oppressed. In as much, Jesus repeatedly reached out with compassion to help those at the bottom.

I am particularly inspired by sacred text that highlights biblical stories depicting Jesus and the disciples lifting the poor from dehumanizing oppressive situations. Sacred text teaches how disciples Peter and John came across a beggar, who was poor and dejected. The beggar asked Peter and John for alms, but Peter replied instead "Look at us. And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, 'I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk. And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.'"²⁹ It is from the same context of care, and compassion that this research project seeks to empower the disempowered.

If we follow the teachings of Jesus, we will be moved to treat each other with neighborly love as described in Matthew's Gospel "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."³⁰ The question one must ponder is: who is my neighbor? Humanitarians would argue, everyone we encounter is our neighbor, and worthy of being treated with love that is life-giving. I believe poor

²⁹ Acts 3:4-7 (NRSV).

³⁰ Matt. 19:19 (NRSV).

theology has made its way into many churches, leading congregants to think the church should only concern itself with spiritual wellbeing. I would argue this kind of thinking invites apathy and ignorance toward social concerns. The church is in a key position to attend to spiritual, social, and physical matters of concern to its immediate community. I believe when we start from a place of love, it gives rise to compassion, mercy, and grace toward all of God's creation, and without prejudice.

Many poor people find it difficult to meet their basic needs for food, shelter, employment, and health care. I would argue there is enough food and resources to end hunger in poor communities. However, lack of coordination makes it challenging to provide basic needs to those living in poverty. In *Hunger for Justice*, Nelson discusses the relationship between poverty, hunger, and malnutrition. According to Nelson, "It is difficult to obtain precise statistics on how many people are poorly nourished, but it is reasonable to assume there is a high correlation between poverty and hunger. Our review of certain biblical passages suggests that hunger is an expression of poverty, and that poverty is a consequence of social injustice."³¹

This project is inspired by the conviction that God's love sustains humanity. It affirms the value of faith practices that reflect God's love and seeks to create and restore family and community relations. Sacred text is reflective of how God expects believers to respond to others in need of help. Biblical passages teach the significance of showing compassion "If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered

³¹ Jack Nelson, *Hunger for Justice*, 47.

garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.”³² Since there is an expectation that faith institutions are to serve as sanctuaries of healing, spiritual care, guidance, common sharing, and justice-making; it stands to reason that underprivileged segments of society look to faith institutions to be its restoring spring of water. However, it is not uncommon to find barriers separating those most in need of restoration from experiencing the spirituality of worship and fellowship that occurs on the inside of church.

In *Jesus and The Disinherited*, Howard Thurman discusses the impact isolation has on the underprivileged, Thurman states “Churches have been established for the underprivileged, for the weak, for the poor, on the theory that they prefer to be among themselves. Churches have been established for the Chinese, the Japanese, the Korean, the Mexican, the Filipino, the Italian, and the Negro, with the same theory in mind. The result is that in the one place in which normal, free contacts might be most naturally established-in which the relations of the individual to his God should take priority over conditions of class, race, power, status, wealth, or the like-this place is one of the chief instruments for guaranteeing barriers.”³³

In *Dust and Breath*, Hotz and Matthews discuss how important it is for churches to embrace the concept of creating programs and ministries aimed at nurturing the broader community. Hotz and Matthews contend “When the church embraces its ministry to whole persons, it will become intentional in creating programs and ministries that encourage the redemption of the whole person. Sometimes these ministries will be clearly related to the bodies of congregation members: there will be exercise classes and nutrition education, the potluck will

³² Isa. 58:10-11 (NRSV).

³³ Thurman, *Jesus of the Disinherited*, 88.

include fresh produce, there will be counseling for those suffering addictions.”³⁴ I would argue that it is through meeting these tangible needs that faith ministries will change living conditions in poor communities. In so doing, meaningful support systems will emerge, creating an environment for lives to be transformed. Ministries will begin to reconnect with segments of society where meaningful community relevancy does not exist.

If we are to believe that the foundation of faith traditions is centered in God’s love for us, then our hearts must be open to the concept of “loving your neighbor as yourself.”³⁵ The teachings of Jesus places as much significance on the love of neighbor as it does on one’s love of God. It is within the context of loving one another that Jack Nelson in *Hunger for Justice* reminds us of the need for churches to be advocates for social change. Nelson highlights the power of advocacy, he asserts “If God’s love is the starting point of faith, the condition of our neighbor is the yardstick by which we judge the effectiveness of our love and the authenticity of our faith. Biblical love is not a measure of our depth of feeling; it is the embodiment of our commitment to change the condition of our neighbor, which depends on our willingness to undergo a personal transformation.”³⁶

In *Hunger for Justice*, Nelson picks up on abuses of power in his examination of broader solutions for addressing the world’s food crisis. Nelson asserts “Many Americans are beginning to realize that they are deeply implicated in the tragedy of the world food crisis, both as executioners and as victims. Unknowingly we have participated in a system that oppresses hungry people worldwide while threatening our lives and well-being. Our recognition of this fact

³⁴ Kendra G. Holt and Matthew T. Mathews, *Dust and Breath: Faith, Health, and Why the Church Should Care about Both* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2012), 27.

³⁵ Matt. 22: 37, 39 (NRSV).

³⁶ Jack Nelson, *Hunger for Justice*, 203.

may lead us to feel angry about the deterioration in the quality of our lives and the health of our communities.”³⁷ There were social conditions of the same sort that served as the backdrop for Jesus’ ministry. Jesus was concerned about the plight of the poor, and went about preaching and teaching in such a way that admonished the rich and wealthy for being overly self-indulgent. Jesus preached against oppression, and systems of injustice. He was concerned about constraints on the poor as imposed by those in power who were in control of decision-making processes.

From a cultural perspective, low income communities of color identify with their faith tradition, and related rituals when faced with hardship. Church ministries in marginalized communities are shaped by family and cultural backgrounds of its church membership. For this reason, I would argue there is real cultural value in establishing faith-based resource centers in marginalized communities.

In *More than Just Food*, Garrett Broad contends that “Projects are too often initiated and controlled by well-meaning but uninformed privileged whites, and their programs consistently ignore racial and cultural difference with respect to inequities in the food system-an ignorance that prohibits such initiatives from achieving transformative and sustainable goals.”³⁸ Important to this research project is the inclusion of community stakeholders, who know firsthand the kind of services that should be at the heart of any project initiated. The project looks to those stakeholders for guidance and direction on targeted resources for communities marginalized.

³⁷ Garret Broad, *More than Just Food*, 158.

³⁸ Garret Broad, *More than Just Food*, 52.

Chapter 4

Research Design and Research Findings

Research Design

In this chapter, I present embedded lived theologies, family history, career and background experiences, which establishes a rationale for the research question posed in this project. The research design is centered in missional objectives that engages stakeholders in cooperative goodwill within communities of concern. In *Faith Seeking Action*, Gregory Leffell discusses the value of crossing boundaries as a means of building up community resource structures. With this in mind, Leffell argues the value of coalition building. Leffell states “Coalitions provide, for example, spaces for a wider community reflection on the issues encountered in mission, strategy development, recruitment, research and training programs, and communication. They also provide connections to seminaries and denominational resources.”³⁹

In addition, further discussion connects autoethnography and outcomes of the research project’s one-on-one interviews. Autoethnography approach will be used to present examination outcomes of visits to comparable resource centers.

Autoethnography Defined

According to *The Ethnographic I*, Carolyn Ellis describes autoethnography as “Writing about the personal and its relationship to culture. It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness.”⁴⁰ Autoethnography presents the writer with the opportunity to express personal experiences and encounters in commentary, and

³⁹ Gregory Leffell, *Faith Seeking Action: Mission, Social Movements, and the Church in Motion* (Lanham:

Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2007), 233.

⁴⁰ Carolyn Ellis, *The Ethnographic I : A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2004), 38.

narrative forms. Ellis asserts that autoethnography text “showcase concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness. These features appear as relational and institutional stories affected by history and social structure, which themselves are dialectically revealed through actions, feelings, thoughts, and language.”⁴¹

Reflexive Dyadic Interviews

For the purpose of presenting the researcher’s experience and account of one-on-one interviews, narratives of these accounts will be presented as Reflexive Dyadic Interviews. Ellis emphasizes the worth of those conducting interviews to allow the interviewee the space to articulate the story, otherwise, the story becomes the interviewer’s, which increases the likelihood of the story changing. Ellis states, “Of course, since the account the interviewee gives is socially constructed in a particular place and time, for a particular hearer, for a particular purpose, under particular conditions – for example, the interviewer selects the questions – the interviewer is always a vital part of the narrative.”⁴²

I gained an understanding of the importance of presenting relative excerpts of interviews with stakeholders from the rigors of journaling. The process of writing field notes, and journaling interviews helped me gain perspective on processes for establishing faith-based resource centers.

Community stakeholders and representatives from offices of elected officeholders, enthusiastically embraced the idea of collaborating on projects involving food initiatives in districts serving marginalized communities. In *Writing and Ethnography*, Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw discuss the interplay between presenting orienting information and excerpt-commentary, saying “In many circumstances, the author needs to orient readers explicitly to the context and

⁴¹ Carolyn Ellis, *The Ethnographic I*, 38.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 61.

previous actions about-to-be-recounted events. Following this orienting sentence, the author presents his excerpt in indented form.”⁴³

Research Findings & Analysis of Findings

I set about securing contact information for specific agencies responsible for rules, regulations, and policies governing farmers’ markets. It was also important to target a specific church parking lot suitable for guiding processes with government and civic agencies. I secured permission from church leadership of Holy Mt. Calvary MBC to use the adjacent parking lot owned by the church for research study. The following orienting information and analytic commentary, presents data relating to processes leading to establishing food support systems in marginalized communities.

Orienting Information: (Southland Farmers’ Market)

The following excerpt recounts the interview I had with a managing representative of Southland Farmers’ Market Association:

After I explained the reason for seeking a meeting with the Farmers’ Association, I provided the manager with more detail about my relationship with the designated church; and the graduate research project at hand. The manager expressed his appreciation for the mission of my chosen research project. He recognized the need for work purposed as outreach to faith communities situated in South Los Angeles. He offered his insight and expertise on the role of Southland Farmers’ Market in marginalized communities. He advised that Southland Farmers’ Market provides consulting services to nonprofits, public agencies, and community groups interested in establishing start-up certified farmer’s markets. This sparked my interest as it was precisely the path of interest to me.

⁴³ Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnote* (Chicago : The University of Chiaco Press, 1995), 183.

The manager advised how Southland provides technical assistance in the area of conducting feasibility studies. He discussed the process for incorporating budget development, and execution of business plans for groups interested in establishing and aiding existing certified farmer's markets.

The manager provided insight on the variety of research studies performed by Southland Farmers' Market. He discussed planning and evaluation processes that Southland offers for groups to consider before taking the leap into launching farmers' market ventures, and other related services. Although he stopped short of sharing the cost for such services, he made it clear that his association charges for services performed.

I shared aspects of the proposed project with him, and put emphasis on churches in marginalized communities lacking financial resources to engage groups like Southland to render professional services. I also discussed how churches in marginalized communities lacked financial resources to engage independent consultants. He encouraged me to consider taking on the task of performing the needed feasibility studies as a service for faith institutions. He believed I had the background experience to do so.

Southland's manager provided referrals to city government planning offices who would help me to determine current zoning. He stressed the importance of finding out if there are already zoning provisions in place that may impact the proposed project. He cautioned me to get an early handle on bureaucratic processes the project will surely be subject to. He offered a heads-up on the importance of gaining understanding of expenses associated with securing permit approval, because it may vary considerably depending on code(s) associated with the project. He suggested key elected officials and area constituent representatives who could assist in helping to mitigate costs for such a

project. He also cautioned me about the demands on agency staff that could impede the process for securing project approval in a timely manner. Finally, he advised that local elected officials and related staff could offer support in navigating bureaucratic processes.

Analytic Commentary: (Southland Farmers' Market)

There were aspects of dialogue with the managing representative that provided insight on navigating bureaucratic processes in ways to avoid much of the red tape. The manager seemed knowledgeable of local government offices that such a project would encounter in the process. I viewed Southland's Farmers' Market manager as a go-to-person for future inquiry and support.

Orienting Information (Los Angeles Building & Safety Department)

The following excerpts provide information obtained from meetings and conference calls with city and county agencies responsible for control over farmers' market permit processes:

I met with a representative from Los Angeles Building & Safety Department (LADBS).

In this meeting I was made aware of particular zoning requirements with steep financial implications for applicants. Building & Safety was able to provide specific zone codes for the designated church site situated at 111th & Main Street. I was directed to contact the city's planning department for interpretation of code provisions. While meeting with the code engineer of LADBS, I gained understanding of the department's role in construction related projects. Thankfully, the research project at hand would not be subject to the wide ranging fees and assessments levied for construction projects in Los Angeles.

In the week prior, I met with church leadership of Holy Mt. Calvary Missionary Baptist Church. I explained to senior leadership how my research project would be grounded in the eventual launch of a faith-based community resource center. At that time, senior leadership of the church granted my research access to information that would assist in

efforts. The church's response was positive regarding looking at alternative uses for their underutilized adjacent parking. The church identified its adjacent parking lot, because of the high foot traffic and visibility on the main street corridor.

Given the short and long term goals of the research project, I thought it important to gather as much information as possible, even if it had no relevance to the current project. I provided the city's code engineer with church property tax assessment information. The code engineer was able to pull all of the church property tax and construction related records. He informed me that the designated church lot was situated in a C2 Zone with an existing Conditional Use Permit. He explained that city planning had already established conditions for any project of interest, therefore, projects proposed would be required to demonstrate compliance with existing conditions. It was a learning experience for me. I understood in situations where pre-existing conditional use permits are not in effect, projects fall under what is described as By-Right. In a By-Right scenario, LADBS would be responsible for issuing permits for establishing farmers' markets.

Staff informed me that the parking lot of interest was situated in the city's Community Redevelopment Area zone, which added another layer of bureaucratic approval process. It meant the project would be subject to review by other community stakeholders such as the Watts Corridor Recovery Area. These agencies have a vision for developing and restoring designated areas of the city. Their role is also key in placing moratoriums that limit licensing of liquor store type businesses in marginalized communities.

Analytic Commentary (Los Angeles Building & Safety Department)

While the church expressed sentiments of hope for the efforts being put forth, there were concerns about the potential for encountering roadblocks dealing with government agencies.

They knew firsthand the difficulties of dealing with inspectors and permit processes from prior years' construction project. The church rallied around the idea of me taking on the challenge of navigating the city's planning department offices on their behalf.

The information I was attempting to secure raised concern from various city staff, who seemed hesitant to give advice seemingly out of fear. My takeaway was that none of staff wanted to be responsible for giving incorrect information. Neither were they interested in taking on unsolicited job duties. I was relieved that church leadership had provided me with a statement authorizing release of information relating to the subject property. Otherwise, not having the statement would have made it impossible for me to engage city staff. The information secured set me on the right path for reaching out to city government stakeholders potentially able to assist with expediting permit processes.

Orienting Information (Los Angeles City Planning Department)

The following excerpt recounts meetings with staff from Los Angeles City Planning Department:

I participated in two one-on-one meetings with the city's planning department. The initial meeting provided general information on roles of various government offices that might be involved with farmers' market approval processes. The meeting got off to a bumpy start, this was after a lengthy process of attempting to engage with a desk representative who lacked people skills. Out of frustration I thought it best to request to speak with a supervisor.

Thankfully, the desk supervisor understood fully what would be required for approving the project at hand. She provided insight on zoning provisions for the designated church parking lot on 111th Street and Main. The supervisor advised that Conditional Use Permits would require sign-off by contiguous properties before approval is granted for

project permit. She explained what steps would be required to complete the process. I learned the church would need neighboring property owners to sign-off in agreement with the new venture. I considered the importance of facilitating a meeting between church leadership and neighboring property owners to discuss the community benefits of such a project. The department supervisor made the suggestion of preparing a letter at the meeting for neighbors to sign in support of the proposed project.

During the meeting, the supervisor consulted with the city's planner to determine the approximate cost for project permit fees in a C2 Zone. Staff estimated a cost of approximately \$6k in city fees. When I asked for justification of such an exorbitant amount, she explained there was a lot of paperwork involved for the city planner's office. I inquired if a fee waiver of some sort was available? This would be necessary since many entities having charitable status are also limited with their financial resources. She indicated there were no waivers available, but suggested strongly that I request a meeting with the city councilperson having jurisdiction over the area where project will be situated. She reminded me of the advantages of working to gain political favor with elected officials. She put emphasis on how important it would be to have a political ally who could advocate on behalf of the project. She searched the district and provided contact information for the city councilman's district office.

In a follow-up meeting with the city planner's office, I visited the City Constituent Services Office. The office is the council's satellite office nearest to the designated church parking lot location. I initially met with the desk code engineer, but was later referred to the code engineer supervisor. The supervisor was knowledgeable of regulatory codes and zoning permits in the area of interest. He reaffirmed information provided by

the city's main office. However, when I provided more information about the project, and the anticipated frequency of holding farmers market, he suggested an alternate path. The supervisor suggested I explore establishing the initial project as a Temporary Special Event. He noted that projects can be approved under this category if they have a maximum duration of 5 consecutive days or infrequent event dates. He directed me to the office that handles permits for temporary special events.

Analytic Commentary (Los Angeles City Planning Department)

I gained perspective on the importance of faith groups and communities making earnest strides to be in relationship with each other. If the church goes forth with intentions of using its parking lot to launch new programs, it will need cooperation of its contiguous neighbors. In my opinion, the church will need to adapt new methods for engaging property owners. I could see where being more inclusive in discussions would help the church in its long term planning. This will be a departure for some churches who are not engaged in community relations at all. Equally important to convincing neighboring property owners to sign-off is being familiar with businesses and how they function in the neighborhood.

Orienting Information (LADBS, Temporary Special Events)

The following excerpt recounts the scheduled telephone conference call with a representative from Los Angeles City Building and Safety Department (LADBS), Temporary Special Events section:

I learned from Los Angeles City Temporary Special Events Department about processes governing permits issued for temporary special events such as carnivals, health fairs, outdoor concerts, and other one-time community events. Temporary Special Events permits are governed by Los Angeles Building and Safety Department, and subject to

restriction. Permit restrictions apply to structure heights, tent size, canopies, stages, and platforms situated on residential and commercial properties. It was explained to me that events falling under the jurisdiction of Temporary Special Events, is subject to onsite LADBS building inspection. Coordination with the city's planning department prior to initiating any approval process with LADBS is highly recommended. Fire and police department enforcement must also be coordinated in the approval process. At present, the cost to file an application with LADBS is \$137.80 annual, and is subject to change yearly.

Analytic Commentary (LADBS, Temporary Special Events)

There are advantages to church congregations engaging community residents in enjoyable social gatherings, because it deepens their connection as stakeholders in common. There are a variety of themed events that can be used to bridge relationship between faith groups, community residents, and civic and government agencies. Churches are wise to consider using under-utilized parking lots and land space to hold special community events that nurture relationships. Special events have the capacity to draw vendors and outside agencies seeking to grow businesses in marginalized communities. A faith-based resource center could facilitate events of this nature by organizing and collaborating with businesses and community stakeholders.

Orienting Information (California Department of Food & Agriculture, Pest Exclusion Branch)

The following excerpt details conversation with a representative specializing in zoning provisions for establishing certified farmers' markets:

The meetings with the Department of Food & Agriculture were detailed and informative. At present, there is one representative responsible for dealing with the public on zoning

and permits relating to certified farmers' markets. The agency schedules meetings based on the representatives early morning work schedule, which starts as early as 5:30AM.

I learned there are some zoning codes that contain provisions that call for projects to be established as Certified Farmers' Market, whereas, others can be established as non-certified. I believed it would be helpful for faith groups to understand the difference between zoning provisions to establish a certified farmer's market, which differs considerably from non-certified farmer's market. From this meeting I was directed to the Department of Food & Agriculture, Pest Exclusion Branch for more information.

I had a meeting with the inspector of Food & Agriculture's, Pest Exclusion Branch. In this meeting we discussed what distinguished State Certified Farmer's markets from non-certified. I learned that in a Certified Farmer's Market, farmers and ranchers are in control of the land, and directly involved with various phases of growing produce. The various aspects of farming and ranching include growing produce, fertilizing, irrigation, pest control, and harvesting. The inspector advised that produce is grown by farmers and ranchers within the state of California. He stated, in order to operate as a certified farmers' market, individuals and/or groups must secure a Produce Certificate issued by the state's agriculture commissioner. Locally, in order for farmers to sell produce at a Certified Farmers' Market, they must secure authorization from the Los Angeles County Department of Agriculture.

In contrast, I learned that non-certified farmers' markets are not subject to abiding to any regulations, therefore, in many instances they are resellers of produce that is likely grown out of state or even in other countries. Health standards of produce distributed by non-

certified markets are not held to the same rules and regulations required of a Certified Farmers' Market.

The inspector explained just what documents are necessary for organizations to begin the application approval process. The documents are as follows:

- Letter of interest from sponsoring church or nonprofit.
- Proof of nonprofit status. Proof should include copy of IRS Tax Exempt letter, which includes tax identification number.
- Completed Department of Agriculture application.
- Document that outlines sponsoring organization personnel structure for operating Certified Farmer's Market. Document must identify manager designated to oversee operation.
- Plot map of site location.
- Document identifying anticipated number of produce vendors as fees are based on number of produce vendors. For example, the permit cost for ten produce vendors or less is \$370 annual. There is no fee waiver for charitable or faith entities.
- Additional nursery stock permit fee of \$150, if organizing agency anticipates selling nursery stock items such as plants.

The inspector informed me of an approximate one – two week permit processing timeline after receipt of the completed application package.

I learned there are budgetary considerations for faith communities to weigh before making a decision to go forward. If the project site is situated in a zone that is subject to compliance with Certified Farmer's Market, there are costly planning department

conditional use permit fees to consider. As previously advised by LADBS, I was given an estimate of \$6,000 in Planning Department permit fees for the project proposed.

Analytic Commentary: (California Department of Food & Agriculture, Pest Exclusion Branch)

Meeting with the Department of Food & Agriculture, Pest Exclusion Branch was an important juncture in researching this project. The managing representative of the department was thorough in helping me to gain perspective on distinguishing differences between certified and non-certified farmers' markets. Establishing neighborhood faith-based resource centers can help circumvent the potential for violating government rules and regulations that can result in costly fees. I believe faith-based resource centers can be a liaison and source of information for communities challenged by government application processes.

Orienting Information: (Los Angeles County Health Department, Environmental Department)

The following excerpt details information concerning health department inspections, and specialized food service programs.

In a conference call meeting with a health inspector of the environmental section of Los Angeles County Public Health Department, I was provided detail information about various health department regulations of importance to nonprofit groups seeking event approval. The inspector left no stone unturned in explaining the difference between permit processes for farmers' market and special events falling under the jurisdiction of Los Angeles County. He explained that while the proposed research project could not escape planning department fees, there was some flexibility with the health department. Currently, he advised the permit cost for community events is \$311, and renewable

annually. However, he noted if an agency has IRS 501(c) 3 charitable status, it is eligible for fee waiver. This would apply to most faith groups.

The inspector informed me of his role in coordinating the approval process for agencies seeking Health Department permits. I learned that permits issued allow agencies to sell and serve food items at sanctioned L.A. County community events.

In relation to the Department of Public Health, Environmental Division, Specialized Food Services Program and Community Events - each have their own distinction from farmers' markets. The inspector cautioned me that the process for approval is cumbersome as there is a lot of paperwork involved. He further warned against going this path if agencies lack volunteer and/or paid staff to oversee operations.

He advised that securing permit approval for the "Specialized Food Services Program" gives agencies the option of selling food items to the community at farmers' markets. In addition, other community event permits allow for pre-packaged foods such as jams, honey, kettle corn, and nut butters to be sold by food vendors on site. Specialized and community type permits, subject agencies to compliance rules and inspections by the County Health Department. To assist agencies seeking community events approval, the Environmental Health Division makes available a helpful Requirements Checklist and Health Code Requirement Sheet for interested organizers to follow. The checklist also outlines sponsoring organization responsibilities.

During my discussion with the inspector I thought it a good opportunity to explore other resource center interests. I believed expanding the project to encompass other events would be appealing to the broader community. I solicited information about what would be required of churches interested in adding seasonal community outreach events to

farmer's market? Given the diversity of marginalized communities I wanted to consider celebratory faith events like All Saints Day, Mardi Gras carnivals, Holy Week, and Thanksgiving dinner events.

The inspector engaged me in conversation about Department of Public Health, Vehicle Inspection Program that governs what is described as Mobile Food Facilities. He explained that with the popularity of food truck vendors, food carts, food festivals, and food tasting events, Mobile Food Facilities are now required to register by submitting a Community Event Temporary Food Facility Application. He informed me that groups must obtain Los Angeles County permits to participate at any community event. The inspector stressed the importance of organizers making certain to require food truck vendors show physical proof of permit. Important to the planning process is securing proof of permits prior to allowing vendors and trucks to set-up.

Analytic Commentary: (Los Angeles County Health Department, Environmental Department)

For health and safety purposes, the county's public health department wields great influence over community programs and events where food is involved. It's important to have a good working relationship with agency staff. Application processes are cumbersome and mind-numbing to complete so open lines of communication with staff goes a long way. It was my observation that having a resource center to advocate on behalf of faith groups would be important. Not only faith-groups, but aspiring entrepreneurs would rally around the idea of receiving support from a resource center. I could see all a resource center could make the processes less wearisome for inexperienced laity to deal with.

Orienting Information (FAME Renaissance, Wholesale Produce Grocer)

The following excerpt details information from a produce wholesaler who met with me to discuss an alternative strategy for establishing a farmer's markets:

I was introduced to an individual who is lead coordinator for the farmers' market at a renaissance market in South Los Angeles. Wamka, an African gentleman, coordinates produce delivery for FAME Renaissance in Los Angeles. He invited me to meet with him to discuss exploring instead of a full blown farmers' market, the option of engaging with a single produce grocer. The produce grocer Wamka recommended is situated in the downtown wholesale produce district. Wamka presented a scenario that would offer weekly, bi-weekly or monthly delivery of farm fresh fruit, vegetables, and nuts to a designated site. He noted the preference would be to find a suitable church parking lot such as the one I was working with. He advised there would be an initial start-up commitment of \$2k for church groups and/or charities. Produce would be delivered in climate-controlled trucks, usually one truck per site. He indicated trucks would remain onsite during the course of one or two days, making it easier to load and unload produce items. He suggested at the beginning it would be best to pair new church organizers with an experienced agency to assure smooth implementation. He emphasized that once the group gains understanding of how to operate a farmers' market, it could transition to independent operation. This type of structure would require pricing; and the exchange of cash and/or credit card exchanges. It gave me pause as I contemplated concerns about staffing the farmers' market with unpaid volunteers.

Analytic Commentary: (FAME Renaissance, Wholesale Produce Grocer)

While I liked the idea of Wamka's proposal, it was my assessment that the proposed arrangement would fall into the category of non-certified farmers' market. I appreciated

gaining perspective on alternative strategies for establishing farmer's markets. He suggested recruiting volunteers to operate the market. However, in this setting other alternative options of paying stipends should be considered. We discussed the possibility of creating a pay system by increasing the consumer price of produce. Wamka understood concerns I expressed of faith groups in marginalized communities having limited financial resources to pay staff.

Orienting Information: (8th District Los Angeles, Constituent Office)

The following excerpt states the outcome of a meeting via conference call with a representative from an elected officeholder's office that is situated in the targeted community:

I met via conference call with a deputy from the office of 8th District of Los Angeles, City Councilman Harris-Dawson. When I identified the initial designated church parking lot address, it sparked the interest of the deputy. He made me aware of how through community outreach projects, the council office was already familiar with the church parking lot. He indicated the church pastor was an active member of the city's community engagement partnership council. The deputy expressed gratitude as he acknowledged the usefulness of specified church parking lots for special community events. The church regularly allows special events to be held in the church parking lot, which support area women and children homeless shelter projects.

After I presented aspects of the research project to the deputy, he wholeheartedly acknowledged the necessity for farmers' market projects in the targeted community. He affirmed the project merited a broader conversation with the council's capital projects team. Knowing financial constraints of local community churches, I expressed concern for the project being dead on arrival if it meant being tasked with paying the estimated

\$6k permit fee. The deputy urged me to prepare and send an executive summary of project proposal for him to present to the councilman. The deputy advised although he was not in position to authorize support himself, he knew it was the type of project his boss wanted to see implemented in the community.

The deputy expressed the vision of the councilman along the same line of supporting community programs such as the project proposed. He discussed the need for fresh produce, fruits and vegetables in a community where it's been absent for too many years.

In our conversation we talked about the need to transform communities of concern into thriving neighborhoods where residents could shop locally. We reminisced about an era when grocery stores and produce markets served as community anchor stores instead of the current liquor stores and smoke shops.

He informed me there was a possibility of not only permit fees being waived, but also potential funding being made available to support the proposed project. He identified agencies with political and financial influence that could be brought in as partners. The deputy indicated that once he received the executive summary, he would get his boss onboard, and then move forward with facilitating a meeting with South East Neighborhood Council, planning directors, and other district directors.

Analytic Commentary: (8th District Los Angeles, Constituent Office)

I was encouraged with progress of fieldwork involving elected officials and civic agencies. With each agency I reached out to, I found senior leadership to be engaging and forthcoming about what it would take to launch the eventual project. I appreciated their willingness to share information and resources of benefit to their constituency. All representatives embraced the idea of establishing a centralized site for the purpose of facilitating food justice systems. Council

district offices expressed interest in forging ahead with collaborative partnerships for targeting meaningful food programs in community redevelopment corridor zones of South Los Angeles.

Orienting Information: (5 Breads and 2 Fish, Food Ministry)

The following excerpt recounts a conference call meeting with the director of 5 Breads and 2 Fish, a faith-based food ministry. The conference call centered on discussing planning processes for exploring the launch of a pilot food giveaway program at one of the faith group parking lot sites:

In a conference call meeting with the director of 5 Breads and 2 Fish, we discussed logistics for launching a church-based free food giveaway program. We discussed the initial faith groups interested in establishing food giveaway services in church owned parking lots. Our dialogue focused on churches that expressed interest in mission services of benefit to immediate neighborhoods. The church groups identified for the initial pilot food giveaway include: Mt. Hebron Missionary Baptist Church in Compton; Holy Mt. Calvary Missionary Baptist Church in South Los Angeles; and Cornerstone Baptist Church in South Los Angeles. I shared my past experience with the director, which encompassed volunteering at churches, senior community centers, and shelters on food drive programs. I also expressed my interest in helping churches in marginalized communities lay the foundation for creating multilevel food programs of benefit to neighboring community residents.

I presented the director of 5 Breads and 2 Fish with the idea of partnering with churches, whose members are primarily African American and Hispanic. I explained how these churches may be open to the concept of repurposing their under-utilized parking lots. It had been my earlier discussion with a couple of the church groups to explore new ways

of doing mission work. I could foresee community residents taking pride in quality food programs being offered to low income families at no cost.

I explained my relationship to the churches as it related to my research as a DMin student at Claremont School of Theology. The director of 5 Breads and 2 Fish was receptive to the idea, but had concerns of oversight in partnering with church groups. He suggested we set aside time later in the week to discuss logistics. He provided a check list of items for me to be ready to respond to in our next conversation. He indicated that he would meet with his committee over the next couple of days to consider acceptance of the project proposal. He cautioned me not to raise my hopes, because the 5 Breads ministry doesn't usually partner with church entities. He explained the preference is to instead partner with senior and community centers. I questioned the reason, he explained that churches have tendency to self-promote and leverage food program as its own, instead of viewing it as a community program.

The director explained although the program is a faith-based food delivery program, they have run into problems in the past supporting other faith ministries. He provided a checklist of items to prepare for discussion at our next meeting. The list included the following items:

- Church board of trustee letter of authorization
- Volunteer list comprised of a mix of community residents and church members
- Acknowledgement letter identifying program liaison
- Memo addressing preference of food delivery day
- Identify clean-up crew to work with food delivery program volunteers
- Method of community outreach to publicize the food giveaway

- Assurance of no leveraging, and no promotion of church.
- List of equipment and supplies needed for weekly set-up.

Analytic Commentary: (5 Breads and 2 Fish, Food Ministry)

I appreciated the director's frankness in sharing his concerns of partnering with other faith groups. It helped me to anticipate challenges I would encounter dealing with church leadership. At the close of my meeting with 5 Breads and 2 Fish, I had a better understanding of the pros and cons of facilitating partnerships with faith groups. I believed I had a good handle on what it would take to recruit the best suited volunteers from each faith group. In light of my meeting with 5 Breads and 2 Fish's director, I recognized the significance of identifying early on site supervisors to serve as lead volunteers. I also knew it would be important to recruit volunteers from the community. However, I felt confident that committed leaders from the community would emerge with the passing of time.

Orienting Information: (Los Angeles City Planning Department)

The following excerpts details meeting outcomes with the City's Planning Department. It outlines specific information pertaining to city rules, policies, permit, and zoning processes for the city:

In a recent face-to-face meeting with the city's planning department, I recognized the current supervising director from a meeting gone bad involving him years ago. At that time, he was newly transferred to the planning department, and not short on ego. I recalled it was my observation back then that he was very hardline, uncompromising, and bureaucratic with a point to prove. The last time we met, he made the encounter quite difficult for me to navigate. I didn't have any success dealing with him back then, and

was very apprehensive about how things would go if I was assigned to meet with him on this occasion. I honestly wanted to forget ever meeting with this gentleman.

As chance would have it, on this occasion, the code engineer I was assigned to meet with was new to the department, and unfamiliar with the special permit type I was inquiring about. He apologetically explained that he would need to get direction from his supervisor, who happened to be the director I was trying to avoid. As the director approached the area we were meeting, I noticed not much had changed about his demeanor. I also considered that my own aching wounds from the past encounter had triggered new internal movements. In taking the pulse of the situation at hand, I thought about how my future work would be impacted if I allowed myself to wallow in defeatism. I knew that frequent encounters with the planning department was in the future so I resisted my internal impulse to be unsociable.

In Rogers book *Practicing Compassion*, he discusses how the experience of grounding oneself in compassion provides way-opening for Taking the U-Turn. Taking the U-Turn in this situation involved discernment, and assessing potential outcomes. More importantly, the opportunity makes way for turning a corner that cultivates new relationship.

As I waited for him to make his way to the meeting area, I gazed about the room, I observed how crowded the office was with people needing assistance. It brought into awareness the possibility of hundreds of people visiting the office each day. It gave me pause, I thought about how difficult it must be to deal with the demands of working in a public setting.

In Rogers book, he discusses the process of cultivating compassion by catching your breath, he states “taking a time-out, walking outdoors, going on a retreat, finding a moment to ourselves or with God, or simply catching our breath solidifies our footing until the ground feels solid, safe, or perhaps sacred enough to engage the situation more clearly.”⁴⁴ When I was able to ground myself long enough to view my surroundings with more compassion, I began to ground myself in empathy for not only the staff, but other people like me, who dread dealing with public service buildings. It was in this moment I imagined this gentleman probably had no clue or memory of any previous encounter with me. It helped me to make light of the occasion.

When I focused on my own internal truth of there being nothing this supervisor could say to rob me of my passion to help the community, it helped to center me in my purpose. I grounded my truth in if not through him, I would pursue strategies with other city agencies. When the director inquired about the properties in question, he asked me to explain the project of interest. Before explaining to him, I acknowledged remembering his years of service and that I appreciated the expertise he could offer my project. I jokingly commented, with all of your years of experience, you surely must know where all the bones are buried? His grimace expression turned to a smile. He responded back, “Yes, I’ve been here so long, people think I’m a part of the building structure, if the building goes down, I go down with it.” We both laughed. I noticed a shift in the overall demeanor of the supervisor, the tone of the meeting shifted, he began to take pleasure in using the meeting as an opportunity to train the new code engineer.

⁴⁴ Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 28.

Surprisingly, the supervisor spent a generous amount of time patiently explaining the different permit types, codes, and variances in regulations that impact conditional use zoning. It was a great learning experience for me as well. It turned out to be a very productive meeting with the department director sharing alternative cost-saving strategies for me to consider with church projects. I also discerned that it was a good day for the new code engineer, because he seemed to delight in learning more about job responsibilities directly from the department director.

At the end of meeting, the supervisor cheerfully pointed me in the right direction to meet with key staff in other departments. These staff persons would eventually help compile meaningful information and resources of direct importance to securing project approval.

The results of this meeting will stand out as favorably memorable.

Analytic Commentary: (Los Angeles City Planning Department)

The meeting with the city planning supervisor gave rise to discernment strategies, and spiritual practice applications that were useful. I reflected on the experience with connection to Frank Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, from which I gained perspective on the significance of being fully present. Having patience and compassion is essential when interacting with government agencies, because the process can be frustrating. The meeting with the city's planning supervisor could have been tense, however, recognizing the signs of volatility helped me to ground myself in Rogers "Taking the U-turn."⁴⁵

Comparable Resource Center Findings

This section examines the structure of comparable resource centers operating in disenfranchised communities. The selected community resource centers take part in delivering

⁴⁵ Frank Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 66.

specific services, not otherwise, accessible free of cost to homeless individuals, and low income families.

The findings discuss local faith-based nonprofits offering public services that target specific needs. These centers provide services that ready individuals to interact with traditional systems of society. It explores services of significant importance to mainstreaming individuals challenged by homelessness and underemployment. Such services include legal aid, food assistance, adult literacy, job referrals, and other types of services that support individuals experiencing hardship.

Orienting Information: (Christian Legal Aid Resource Center)

The following excerpt details the learning outcomes from telephone and email communication with a legal aid resource center situated in South Los Angeles:

I gained perspective on how to structure program design for the intended resource center with links to faith-based and civic entities. Similar to the structure intended for this research project, that is, to serve as a facilitating bridge between faith institutions and neighboring South Los Angeles community residents. This legal aid center was created as a 501(c) 3 nonprofit corporation with a mission of using its legal resources to ensure justice and equality where it is missing. The Center offers personalized legal services, referrals, training workshops, and educational seminars to residents of disenfranchised communities.

The center's training workshops and seminars are designed to empower disenfranchised communities with the tools to handle their own legal matters. Mostly pro bono staff liaison with faith groups and charities to provide emergency legal services, mediation, and educational seminars to low income community residents. It uses California Housing

income guidelines as the criteria for determining client eligibility. The center's staff operates with the support and assistance of attorney volunteers, career professionals, and community faith groups to provide desperately needed legal aid services.

Analytic Commentary: (Christian Legal Aid Resource Center)

Outreach to the center was purposed in learning more about legal aid services pertaining to expungement of criminal records. One of the long term goals of the research project's faith-based resource center is to assist disenfranchised individuals and families with expungement services. Through Christian Legal Aid I gained knowledge about training and funding opportunities related to expungement of criminal records. Providing expungement services to disenfranchised individuals could be an eventual source of income for the proposed resource center.

Orienting Information: (5 Breads and 2 Fish, Food Ministry)

I visited a charitable faith and food ministry situated in the skid row area of downtown Los Angeles. The following excerpt explains how it functions, and my learning outcomes from the visit:

I visited the main headquarters of an established faith and food ministry situated in skid row of downtown Los Angeles. I was able to observe operations, and gain broad perspective on various ways to meet the needs of unemployed and homeless individuals. In so doing, I witnessed critical services of importance extended to the homeless population on multiple levels. The most widely used service includes postal mailbox services for homeless individuals and families. The faith and food ministry operates as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, which performs charitable service to primarily the homeless population of downtown Los Angeles Skid Row area.

I observed how the organization works tirelessly to provide meaningful support services to the poorest. This faith and food ministry is changing lives of the poorest through its charitable organization 5 Breads and 2 Fish. What I learned is that 5 Breads and 2 Fish is a food ministry that offers many valuable services to hundreds of clients. The organization 5 Breads and 2 Fish, offers mailbox services to Skid Row residents of downtown Los Angeles for accessing U.S. Postal Service. There is a growing number of homeless families who would not, otherwise, have access to mail service to receive government benefits if not for the charitable efforts of 5 Breads and 2 Fish resource center.

The organization has a network of like-minded agencies to assist homeless families with housing, jobs, medical treatments and other resources of benefit. Through community partnerships, 5 Breads and 2 Fish receives tons of charitable food donations from major grocers in the Los Angeles County area. These grocers donate groceries that are within days of the should be sold by date. It is through these sponsors that 5 Breads and 2 Fish is able to facilitate partnerships with community and faith-based groups throughout Los Angeles County. These groups are able to distribute groceries and fresh produce to marginalized communities on a weekly basis. The organization also delivers food, produce, and other non-perishable goods to faith groups serving poor communities of Ensenada, Mexico.

Analytic Commentary: (5 Breads and 2 Fish, Food Ministry)

The first meeting opened the door to work cooperatively with 5 Breads and 2 Fish on projects serving mission needs of families in crisis. Since then I have had several meetings with representatives from 5 Breads and 2 Fish to discuss development of more programs in poor

communities. Through relationship with 5 Breads and 2 Fish, I have been able to facilitate a pilot faith-based food giveaway program in South Los Angeles. Since its inception, the pilot food giveaway program has increased its distribution of free grocery filled boxes from 20-households weekly at the beginning to 115-households at year-ending December 2017.

Chapter 5 Discussion

Critical Reflection

Given everything we considered in the research project, there are essential matters we should be attentive to moving ahead. Important to establishing faith-based resource centers in marginalized communities is communication and cooperation with, and from stakeholders. Although a tedious process, mapping out and getting to know the community of stakeholders is essential to establishing faith-based resource centers. In so doing, it slowly begins the process of networking, and nurturing faith community relationships.

In *Practicing Right Relationship*, Sellon & Smith discuss multiple approaches to drawing people to faith communities. Though often overlooked, church bodies must consider new strategies for deepening relationships as a means of building God's kingdom. According to Sellon & Smith "God's world work invites us to remove the walls and gates from our beloved communities. World work calls us to expand our circles, including additional parts of God's world into our relationships. Expanding the circle and including others churns up the patterns of our present relationships."⁴⁶ Establishing faith-based resource centers can be a viable path for church groups to better connect with community. There are legitimate obstacles to consider.

In the early phase of research, every time I engaged the church in discussion about working cooperatively with the research project to develop programs, I butted heads with some of the leadership. It took several months to figure out the right approach for dealing with some of the resistant members of the church board. I finally realized that I needed to step back and take a

⁴⁶ Mary K. Sellon and Daniel P. Smith, *Practicing Right Relationship: Skills for Deepening Purpose, Finding Fulfillment, and Increasing Effectiveness in Your Congregation* (Hendon: The Alban Institute, 2005), 121.

good look at who the key players would be in the decision-making process. It was then the senior pastor shifted his stance away from the board, and moved toward forming a committee to liaison with the research project. The shift in dynamics was the turning point for the research project.

Through meetings and having conversations with civic and government agencies, I learned the importance of letting go of preconceived notions about what to expect. I am grateful for the opportunity I had to engage with the city's planning office. It actually had the potential to stir-up less than positive interior movements, but thankfully the outcome was positive. I have noticed over time practicing Rogers act of "taking the other's pulse"⁴⁷ to be a loving and powerful way of grounding oneself in compassion. In my experience, "taking the other's pulse"⁴⁸ is a way of connecting with compassion to what life circumstances must be like for the other person.

The conversation with the city planner had the potential of going in the opposite direction. If I had allowed my past experience with him to get in the way of interaction needed between us for the impending project, the project could have been blocked. In *Difficult Conversations*, Stone, Patton, and Sheen discuss the interactive process of creating a learning conversation. According to Stone, Patton, and Sheen "A real conversation is an interactive process – one where you are constantly going to be listening, sharing your view, asking questions, and negotiating to get the conversation back on track when it goes off the rails."⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 81.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 81.

⁴⁹ Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen, *Difficult Conversations: How to Address What Matters Most* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 162.

I believe Dr. Rogers process of “Taking the U-Turn”⁵⁰ is intended to bring into line, human impulses that are often left unattended to. I would argue that, “Taking the U-Turn”⁵¹ is an open invitation to explore the root of what’s going on internally with oneself, and with the other. For me, the process calls for patience, empathy, and understanding in a way that cultivates connection in relationships. To be clear, in the face of difficult moments, “Taking the U-Turn”⁵² is an opportunity to be kind, goodhearted, and genuinely empathetic.

In Lasater’s book on *What We Say Matters*, it discusses how empathy brings about connection in relationships. It states “when you offer an empathic guess as to what is going on for them at this moment, it is much more likely they will shift into the present moment and into a connection with you. When you lead them gently into an empathetic connection, you both will probably enjoy the moment more.”⁵³ I experienced what Lasater is speaking to when I felt a new sense of empathetic connection with the city’s planning department supervisor. I believe being curious opens the door to listening, observing, and learning. It helped me to let go of the assumptions I had made about the city’s planning supervisor being difficult to deal with.

Seeing the reality of what is happening in marginalized communities put the research project on a path of seeking to improve living conditions. This path guided the project in looking at comparable centers providing service and aid to disenfranchised communities. It was this endeavor of visiting comparable centers that illuminated the infinite reign of God’s work in the world. It helped me to discern in a bold way the limitless realm of services a faith-based resource

⁵⁰ Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 66.

⁵¹ Ibid., 66.

⁵² Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 66.

⁵³ Lasater and Lasater, *What We Say Matters*, 41.

center could be to poor communities. In my opinion, the long and short term focus of service for any faith-based resource center must be grounded in empowerment.

Establishing faith-based resource centers in marginalized communities sends a message that decision makers are empathetically extending a gesture of friendship. It gives hope where it doesn't exist. In many congregations situated in marginalized communities, there are families in need of help with educational resources. Whether it be scholarship information, tutoring or academic support – help is always needed. Given specific areas targeted for service by comparable centers, the research project realizes the significance of focusing on two specific areas in its early phase of implementation. Food service was a specific area of concentration for the research project. Therefore, facilitating programs with the intention of putting food on the tables of low income families is a high priority.

In *Mapping Christian Education*, Jack Seymour discusses Christian education as an invaluable service to communities. Seymour contends “Educating persons is a central task of Christian education. A person is formed inwardly through silence, listening, and Sabbath; a person responds with outward action through study and service that relates us to others and to the cosmos. The inner life and outward activity are intimately interrelated.”⁵⁴ It would be tragic to ignore getting involved in encouraging at-risk young people to better understand the importance of basic financial literacy. Therefore, the research project envisions building a learning community where at-risk young people receive an orientation to basic faith-based financial literacy.

⁵⁴ Jack L. Seymour, *Mapping Christian Education: Approaches to Congregational Learning* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 72.

Recommendation for Establishing Faith-Based Resource Centers in Marginalized Communities

In consideration of the literature review, theological and theoretical foundation, findings from meetings, and an examination of other related resource centers, few would doubt the desperate need for establishing meaningful support systems in communities of concern. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to discuss what should be considered in establishing faith-based resource centers in marginalized communities. The result of this body of work leads to the next step in the process, namely an integration of feedback from the community stakeholders in the recommendations that are given to the stakeholders. The outcome of meetings, encounters, and emerging opportunities provide a broader framework of action for establishing a faith-based community resource center. However, due to time constraints, the recommendations for this research project centers on laying the foundation for the center's initial framework.

As I analyzed the outcomes of meetings and visits with community stakeholders, I could not think of a situation involving a faith-based resource center that would not involve authentic involvement of community stakeholders. In *Transforming Congregations through Community*, Boyung Lee argues the necessity of community bridge building for the survival of churches in the future. In this regard, Boyung Lee states "As Jesus said, without having a container that is compatible with its contents, it is not easy to use the contents for their purpose. If a church wants to be a communal church, both their programs and structures should embody the sense of

community.”⁵⁵ The power of Lee’s argument resonated with me as significant in every step of developing faith-based resource centers in community marginalized.

An essential component to establishing faith-based resource centers in marginalized communities; is the understanding that it is impractical to think it can be done by faith alone. Faith-based development is possible if, certain steps are taken to plant a resource center as an extension of an existing church. In order to maintain separate financial structures from the church’s organization, it is wise to create a separate entity for the resource center to operate under the umbrella of. To this end, government involvement is necessary for the labor intensive process of forming a 501(c)3, which is the method for establishing the financial viability for resource center to operate.

There are ways for church leadership to avoid delays in securing IRS approval for, financially challenged faith-based organizations situated in poor communities. Engaging the professional services of an independent agent or agency is the safest path for church groups. A faith-based resource center could arguably perform similar services as Southland Farmers’ Market provides, but with emphasis on assisting faith groups needing to interact with government and civic agencies.

There are multiple possibilities for structuring a faith-based resource center. In *Not by Faith Alone*, Adkins, Occhipinti, and Hefferan examine Christian organizations whose services are uniquely structured to meet the practical needs of urban communities. I was drawn to Adkins, Occhipinti, and Hefferan’s discussion about a particular entity that started off as a ministry, but

⁵⁵ Boyung Lee, *Transforming Congregations through Community: Faith Formation from the Seminary to the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 109.

eventually evolved into an “Urban Center.”⁵⁶ They describe its unique structure, indicating that “it consists of three separate entities: a clearinghouse of services that meet the practical needs of the community on a case by case basis, a partnership that reaches out to the youth in the community, and the actual house in which interns and volunteer groups are housed.”⁵⁷ Although Adkins, Occhipinti, and Hefferan referred to this structure as a “New kind of Evangelical ministry, independent of any particular congregation,”⁵⁸ I envision this type of resource center approach to ministry as a much needed way of bringing the experience of fellowship that goes on inside of the church, to the broader and more diverse community that exists beyond the walls of the church.

Most church doors are open to the community primarily one day a week, that is, on Sunday. However, in many ways, establishing faith-based resource centers in marginalized communities can ensure that divinely inspired agents of God will continuously be on ground-zero of social need, performing social justice work every single day of the week. The theological and theoretical foundation of this research project is centered on breaking down barriers that impede brotherly love, and community engagement. During the course of this research project, I continued to be inspired by similar mission movements across the nation made up of like-minded individuals and groups, who put their faith into action to improve living conditions of underserved communities.

In *Faith Seeking Action*, I was reminded of how marginalized communities today are the continuation of the ground-zero of oppressed communities that existed in ancient times.

⁵⁶ Julie Adkins, Laurie Occhipinti, and Tara Hefferan, *Not by Faith Alone: Social Services, Social Justice, and Faith-Based Organizations in the United States* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 167.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 168.

Consistent with the project's theological and theoretical foundation, I found other social justice resource centers that are grounded in "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."⁵⁹ Where there may be levels of ambivalence by church congregants and laity to engage in evangelism, there is consensus in the movement of active humanitarian ministries like Christian Legal Aid and 5 Breads & 2 Fish, who are unafraid to be agents of God to the unchurched.

It is from a place of binding the church with needs of the community, that churches will have the greatest chance of gaining relevance again. I envision faith-based resource centers to be the binding link between churches and communities seeking to have basic needs met. In *Faith Seeking Action*, Gregory Leffel asserts how "Jesus' action made God's good news local and concrete. On fishing boats, around village wells, in the homes of tax-collectors another way of life broke out. The new way is justice, peace, and reconciliation with others activated by loving one's neighbor. Its new consciousness is personal faith and spiritual reconciliation activated by loving the one true God."⁶⁰

In my opinion, it is essential to ground oneself in identifying specific areas of service for initial unveiling of resources to the community. This is the cornerstone of establishing the type of faith-based resource center that this research project recommends. Research of this project focuses on several areas of service to marginalized communities. While efforts will go forth to bring all identified areas of service into fruition, realistically, the main objective will be to focus on one or two areas of concentration for initial implementation.

Research findings and preliminary work lead me to believe that in order to establish a faith-based resource center, it's essential to consider the following specific areas of service.

⁵⁹ Matt. 19:19 (NRSV).

⁶⁰ Leffel, *Faith Seeking Action*, 213.

1. Act as a facilitator for the purpose of negotiating use of under-utilized church parking lots and land space to create certified and non-certified farmers' markets in marginalized communities.
2. Develop faith-based education training of benefit to youth in need of Basic Financial Literacy (See Appendix).
3. Build a network database of faith groups and, public, and private agency community stakeholders as an outreach resource for community resource centers. (See Appendix)

Establishing a viable network database comprised of community stakeholders is essential. This research project went about building a network of outreach resources during the early stages of research development. The findings and learning outcomes are outlined in the autoethnography chapter of research project. Specific city and county offices, department representatives, elected official, civic agencies, non-profits, and faith group leadership have proven to be valuable resources in completing this research project.

Networking will be vital to establishing resource centers in marginalized communities in South Los Angeles. There is a genuine desire by elected officials to undergird efforts to establish faith-based community resource centers with the financial resources and technical staff needed to accomplish this project. To this end, continuing to increase outreach to elected officials is important to build any network database.

Bringing basic financial literacy training to youth of marginalized communities will give at-risk students a much needed educational boost. The upside of developing a faith-based financial literacy training program specifically for low income families serves multiple purposes. Resource centers working with faith groups are better suited to provide young people an

orientation to biblical studies and basic finances at the same time. In marginalized communities, young people would not otherwise receive basic financial literacy training in a traditional classroom setting.

Conclusion

The mission of this research project is the central concept of attending to the needs of individuals impacted by hardship, suffering, and the feeling of being abandoned by society. The main intentions of vivifying this project are altruism, neighborliness, and advocacy for the benefit of segments of society sidelined by tough life circumstances.

In focusing on marginalized communities, I have chosen efforts that will have the most meaningful impact on improving living conditions. I am concerned with helping communities greatly ignored by agencies. I want a real impact to be made. Therefore, the mission of making faith-based resource centers available to marginalized and disenfranchised people will address a wide range of community needs that the community members themselves have expressed.

The research project was grounded in love of neighbor, and the care of neighbors. Therefore, it is essential for the spirit and love of God to be at the very center of any resource or service that evolves from it.

Bibliography

- Bass, Diana Butler. *Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church is Transforming the Faith*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006.
- Barentsen, Jack. *Emerging Leadership in the Pauline Mission: A Social Identity Perspective on Local Leadership Development in Corinth Ephesus*. Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2011.
- Branson, Mark Lau. *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry, Missional Engagement, and Congregational Change*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2016.
- Broad, Garrett. *More than Just Food: Food Justice and Community Change*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2016.
- Campbell, Cathy C. *Stations of the Banquet: Faith Foundation for Food Justice*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003
- Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen. *Difficult Conversations: How to Address What Matters Most*. New York: Penguin Books, 2010.
- Ellis, Carolyn. *The Ethnographic I : A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*. Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2004.
- Frey, Susan., *Juvenile Justice System Schools: Do More Harm Than Good*, Accessed February 15, 2018,
<https://edsources.org/2014/report-juvenile-justice-system-schools-do-more-harm-than-good/63524>.
- Hadaway, C. Kirk. *Behold I Do a New Thing: Transforming Communities of Faith*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001.
- Harold W. Attridge, and Wayne A. Meeks. *The HarperCollins Study Bible: Including Apocryphal Deuterocanonical Books*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006.
- Harris, James Henry. *The Courage to Lead: Leadership in the African American Urban Church*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2002.
- Holt, Kendra G., and Matthew T. Mathews. *Dust and Breath: Faith, Health, and Why the Church Should Care about Both*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2012.
- Julie Adkins, Laurie Occhipinti, and Tara Hefferan. *Not by Faith Alone: Social Services, Social Justice, and Faith-Based Organizations in the United States*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010.
- Ken Abala and Trudy Eden. *Food & Faith: In Christian Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

- Lasater, Judith Hanson, and Ike K. Lasater. *What We Say Matters: Practicing Nonviolent Communication*. Berkeley: Rodmill Press, 2009.
- Lee, Boyung. *Transforming Congregations through Community: Faith Formation from the Seminary to the Church*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013.
- Leffel, Gregory. *Faith Seeking Action: Mission, Social Movements, and the Church in Motion*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2007.
- Maathai, Wangari Muta. *Unbowed - A Memoir*. New York: Anchor Books, 2007.
- Mary K. Sellon and Daniel P. Smith. *Practicing Right Relationship: Skills for Deepening Purpose, Finding Fulfillment, and Increasing Effectiveness in Your Congregation*. Hendon: The Alban Institute, 2005.
- Merriam-Webster Online, "marginalize," accessed January 18, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/marginalize>.
- Nelson, Jack A. *Hunger for Justice: The Politics of Food and Faith*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1980.
- Paul M. Cohen and Frances Hesselbein. *Leader to Leader: Enduring Insights on Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999.
- Richard Amesbury and George M. Newlands. *Faith and Human Rights: Christianity and the Global Struggle for Human Dignity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.
- Richard, Matthieu. *Altruism: The Power of Compassion to Change Yourself and The World*. New York: Back Bay Books/Little, Brown and Company, 2013.
- Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago : The University of Chiaco Press, 1995.
- Rogers, Frank Jr. *Practicing Compassion*. Nashville: The Upper Room, 2015.
- Seymour, Jack L. *Mapping Christian Education: Approaches to Congregational Learning*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997.
- Steve Ventura and Martin Bailkey. *Good Food, Strong Communities: Promoting Social Justice through Local and Regional Food Systems*. Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2017.
- Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1976.
- Vocabulary, "disenfranchised," Accessed January 18, 2018, <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/disenfranchised>.

